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152 DEAD & COUNTING AS 7.7 QUAKE FLATTENS MYANMAR, THAILAND

AGENCIES @ Bangkok

A powerful earthquake rocked Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand on Friday, destroying scores of buildings, a bridge and a dam. At least 144 people were killed in Myanmar, where photos and video from two hard-hit cities showed extensive damage. At least eight died in the Thai capital, where a high-rise under construction collapsed.

The 7.7 magnitude quake, with an epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, struck at midday and was followed by a strong 6.4 magnitude aftershock. The full extent of deaths, injury and destruction was not immediately clear — particularly in Myanmar, one of the world's poorest countries. It is embroiled in a civil war and information is tightly controlled.

The head of Myanmar's military government said in the televised speech on Friday evening that at least 144 people were killed and 730 others were injured.

Photos from Naypyidaw showed multiple buildings used to house civil servants destroyed, and rescue crew pulling victims from beneath the rubble. Myanmar has declared a state of emergency.

Near Bangkok's popular Chatuchak market, a 33-storey building under construction, with a crane on top, crumpled into a cloud of dust, with onlookers screaming and running in a video posted on social media.

The sound of sirens echoed throughout central Bangkok and vehicles filled the streets, leaving some of the city's already congested streets gridlocked. The elevated rapid transit system and subway shut down. While the area where the quake struck is prone to earthquakes, they are usually not so big and it is rare for them to be felt in the Thai capital, which sits on a river delta and is at moderate risk for quakes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "India stands ready to offer all possible assistance." P14

A videograb of onlookers near the 33-storey high-rise in Bangkok that collapsed on Friday after the earthquake | AP

1,500

EARTHQUAKES HAVE HIT MYANMAR SINCE 1950 TILL THE PRESENT DAY

WHY ARE SHALLOW QUAKES LETHAL?

The earthquake that hit Myanmar and Thailand on Friday was shallow, as per the US Geological Survey. Shallow earthquakes are more dangerous than deeper ones due to their greater energy release closer to the Earth's surface. Seismic waves from deeper quakes lose energy by the time they reach the surface.

MONEY MATTERS

Polls in mind, Bihar gets added Cabinet attention

3,712.40 cr | **6,282.32 cr**

COST | (N E)

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approves construction of 4-lane greenfield and brownfield Patna-Arrah-Sasaram corridor in Bihar under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana. Cost includes ₹3,652.56 crore Central assistance component

CCEA approves inclusion of Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link Project in Bihar under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana. Cost includes ₹3,652.56 crore Central assistance component

₹22,919 cr

COST

Electronics component manufacturing scheme approved for making India Atmanirbhar in the electronics supply chain. Projected to attract investment of ₹59,350 crore; production of ₹4.5L crore worth of goods; generate 91,600 jobs

No FIR for now against Justice Varma, says SC

● Says CJI can take call after inquiry ● Bar body upset

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

CALLING it "premature", the Supreme Court on Friday rejected a PIL seeking Delhi Police to register an FIR against Delhi High Court's Justice Yashwant Varma over the alleged discovery of burnt wads of cash from his official residence on March 14.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said an in-house inquiry was in progress and there would be several options open to the Chief Justice of India after the probe's conclusion.

Yashwant Varma

The bench, therefore, refused to examine the plea of advocate Mathews J Nedumpara and three others.

"We have seen the prayers. After the in-house inquiry is over, several options are open. If the report indicates something is wrong, the chief justice (of India) can direct the register of the FIR or refer the matter to the Parliament after examining the report," the court said. Petitioners Mathews J Nedumpara, Hemali Suresh Kurne, Rajesh Vishnu Adrekar and Mansha Nimesh Mehta had submitted that their plea pertained to a larger public interest and sought a direction from the court for registration of an FIR.

A fire at Justice Varma's official residence on March 14 led to the alleged discovery of wads of burnt cash in an outhouse of the judge's residence. Justice Varma was not in New Delhi at the time of the fire, and has denied all charges.

Subsequently, CJI Sanjiv Khanna formed a three-member in-house panel, consisting of Justice Sheel Nagu, Chief Justice of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana, Justice G S Sandhawalia, Chief Justice of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh, and Anu Sivaraman, Judge of the High Court of Karnataka. The panel has been mandated with an inquiry into the allegations against Justice Varma, the second senior-most Judge of the HC of Delhi.

'ALLAHABAD HC TURNED INTO DUMPING GROUND'

Allahabad HC Bar Association president Anil Tiwari said they will boycott Justice Varma's swearing-in. "I don't know what compelled the govt to issue this transfer notification."

CASH ROW: 1991 SC ORDER BACK IN FOCUS

The SC rejecting a plea for FIR brought into focus its 1991 verdict virtually granting immunity to judges. A bench in the K Veeraswami case directed no criminal case should be registered against a judge unless the CJI is consulted

Courts step up to save free speech

Supreme Court quashes FIR against Imran Pratapgarhi

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Friday quashed the FIR lodged by Gujarat police against Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi over a poem in a video clip uploaded by him on social media. The 46-second video clip showed the Rajya Sabha MP being showered with flower petals as he walks, with the poem playing in the background. The FIR alleged it contained provocative lyrics that pitted communities against one another aside from hurting religious sentiments.

Imran Pratapgarhi

A bench of justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said the poem had nothing to do with religion, caste, community, or any particular group, adding that the police must first understand the meaning of written or spoken words before lodging FIR in such cases. The court said it is important that people have the freedom to express through different forms of art including poetry, drama, music, satire.

HC grants interim bail to comedian Kunal Kamra

R SIVAKUMAR @ Chennai

THE Madras High Court on Friday granted interim anticipatory bail till April 7 to comedian Kunal Kamra in a case registered against him by Khar police in Mumbai over his jokes on Maharashtra deputy CM Eknath Shinde.

Kunal Kamra

"The petitioner has satisfied this court as to why he is unable to approach the courts in Maharashtra immediately for protection," Justice Sunder Mohan said in his order.

In his petition, Kamra said he has been a resident of Tamil Nadu's Villupuram district since 2021 and that he fears physical harm if he travels to Maharashtra in response to the summons by Khar police.

While granting interim protection, Justice Sunder Mohan directed Kamra to execute a bail bond before the judicial magistrate. Justice Mohan also issued notice to Khar police and posted the matter to April 7.

CYBER FRAUD

Aged B'gavi couple dies by suicide

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Belagavi

AN aged couple died by suicide as they were unable to bear the mental torture by cyber criminals at Bidi near Khanapur on Thursday night.

Diego Santana Nazareth, 82, slit his throat, while his wife **Flaviana Nazareth**, 79, drank poison.

According to Belagavi Superintendent of Police Bhimashankar Guled, the couple had transferred more than Rs 50 lakh to cyber criminals after getting threat calls from them in the past few days. They decided to take the extreme step when the cyber criminals started harassing them for more money.

The fraudsters informed the couple that their IDs had been misused by some people, who committed a cyber crime in New Delhi. Later, they gave a phone number to the couple stating that it was the police crime branch from where they could get more details. When the couple dialled the number, they were threatened and forced to transfer money to some bank accounts online. P7